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Collection: Gene W. Poor Digital Archive

File Name: 1988_successfullineducationandbusiness_final.pdf

Pages Included: One with picture Gene Poor and Einstein robot

Title of Work: Prof is Successful in technical world

Author / Reporter: Cathy Belfort

Publisher / Organization: BG News 4/29/1988

Captured By: Dr. Gene W. Poor

Date Captured / Scanned: November 2025

Description/Subject: Overview of Gene Poor's life from never intending to go to college to becoming a university professor with internships with Johnny Carson and Fred Rogers.

Overview of Gene W. Poor's journey from unlikely college student to professor, with formative internships at Johnny Carson and Fred Rogers.

This piece provides a summary of Dr. Gene W. Poor's unlikely and inspiring journey from a young man who never intended to attend college to becoming a university professor, entrepreneur, and pioneer in applied creativity and animatronics.

Poor's academic and professional path took an unexpected turn during his time at Kent State University, where he discovered both the confidence and opportunity to pursue higher education. His graduate work led to rare and highly influential internships with *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson* (NBC) and *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* (WQED) — experiences that shaped his lifelong interest in performance, storytelling, media production, and the human side of technology.

These formative experiences ultimately guided his career in academia, where he became a longtime professor, founder of the Visual Communication Technology program at Bowling Green State University, and later the Scott Hamilton Endowed Professor of Entrepreneurship.

Digitized and preserved for educational and historical reference by Dr. Gene W. Poor, November 2025.

Prof is successful in technical world

by Cathy Belfiore

4/29/1982

Somehow, everyone knows someone, who knows someone else, who knows someone famous. But fame does not always refer to celebrities and movie stars.

There are several people at the University who could be considered famous just because of their abilities and successes.

Gene Poor is one of them.

Visual communications technology professor, Poor considers each one of his students special and unique. He encourages creativity in his classes to bring out the "celebrity" in each student. "Each one of us is a bit of every person we ever loved," Poor says. He adds that, "education is part show business and part mental seduction," and jokingly refers to campus as "the country club" with the Student Union being the "clubhouse."

He enjoys teaching in an environment is fun and enjoyable and in which he can share his experiences with his students. In 1985, he received a Faculty Excellence Award from the University Undergraduate Student Government Association for consistent and excellent skills in teaching and student counseling.

Ironically, after high school, Poor was one of the least likely to attend college. "My father owned a Pepsi plant. I was going to work for him," laughs Poor. "He fired me after one week!"

Poor was approached by a some former high school teachers who suggested he go to college and become a teacher. "I laughed at them," Poor said. "I told them that if they could get me in, I'd go."

But Poor received his B.A. in industrial education in 1966 and his M.E. in 1969, both from Kent State University.

He began his teaching career in 1966 at Ravenna High School in the Industrial

Arts Department, and joined the University in 1970 to begin working on his doctoral program. He studied with Dick Swanson who later offered him the job of developing a visual communications technology program.

This program prepares students to become what Poor calls "a gifted generalist" in communications technology and provides a choice of 21 occupational cluster specializations. Poor teaches courses in photography, video tape production and



Gene Poor, visual communications technology professor, is a master of many professions. He is showing his most popular robot Einstein.

film making, television, design and graphic communication, and career acquisition.

As an internship requirement for his doctoral studies, Poor worked for one month each with Johnny Carson's "Tonight Show," Fred Rogers of "Mr. Rogers" and Eastman Kodak.

For the Carson show, Poor recalls, "I called and asked to speak to the youngest guy on the staff. I introduced myself, told him what I was doing and asked him if I could come up and spend some time with them." Poor worked as the first unit manager for "Rare Tan Productions" coordinating facets for "The Tonight Show."

After completing a dissertation on Fred Rogers, Poor landed an internship where he worked with the writers of the show and was offered a job six months later. At Eastman Kodak he worked with the head of the Educational Marketing Services.

Besides teaching, Poor also develops and designs animatronics for a Toledo firm, Good Displays. He has created several robots used in trade shows and other commercial industries. His most popular robot, Einstein, has been adopted by the University as spokesperson for the University's programs.

As a consultant in creativity, motivation and organizational communication, Poor works for several large businesses analyzing what they believe their employees need to know and then developing training programs for them.

Poor is also the author of numerous publications in academic journals, former owner and designer of the restaurant "The Parrot and the Peacock" (currently The Soft Rock Cafe), and is a member of the American and Ohio Industrial Arts Associations and the American and Ohio Councils in Industrial Arts Teacher Education.